

The WA County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

Qualitative Needs Assessment: Summary of Local Providers Interviews

Homeless Singles in WA County, OR

Current Trends

- Homeless singles are typically living in wooded areas, campsites, in park bushes, in transit centers, along the freeway, and parks of WA County.
- Homeless singles are also found living all along the artery/light rail corridor.
- The number of homeless singles is observed by emergency providers to be increasing.
- The number of single women in particular is observed to be increasing
- Homeless single women often come to WA County from Portland for safety reasons – they find the County to be a less intimidating environment.
- As there are no programs in WA County where local law enforcement can refer homeless singles causing a disturbance, police are forced to move them from one town to the next. This is a nonproductive pattern that does not help resolve their homelessness.
- Some homeless singles seem to be in WA County because they are intimidated by the emergency shelter scene in Portland.
- Portland's homeless singles are more prevalently seriously mentally ill than the group in WA County. Some members of the WA County group avoid the Portland scene for this reason.
- Homeless singles are contacting local housing and service groups seeking immediate emergency placements– typically in colder weather.
- Homeless singles in the County who already have service contacts in Portland are often willing to transport to one of the many good programs in Portland.
- Private landlords in WA County tend to be compassionate with older seriously mentally ill tenants who can not always pay rent – i.e. they do not jump to eviction but try to work with the tenant to maintain the tenancy.
- The County has three mental health service providers all of which are accessible to the homeless.

Unmet Needs

- In general, WA County has poor connections/ engagement with its homeless singles.
- WA County's lack of service for singles means it does not have a good system for counting homeless singles – i.e. the grasp of the problem is not well documented.
- There is no place in the County to refer a homeless individual who requests emergency shelter on short notice – i.e. who presents in crisis.
- There are very few public places for homeless singles to take a shower
- There is no place for homeless singles to go when temperature drops and they need protection from cold.
- Homeless singles have few if any places to do their laundry.
- There is very little help in general available for singles in WA County.
- A homeless shelter dedicated to serving singles is considered lacking by some.
- The existing drop-in setting in the County does not meet all needs.
- Needed is a program for the many homeless singles disinclined to go to Portland.
- Singles that do not fall into special populations categories are underserved.
- Some believe there is a need for a barrier free/low threshold alternative drop-in setting for persons who are deterred from using structured services.
- Particularly needed is a similar setting as the existing Safe Haven in WA County – but for those who are not dually diagnosed – i.e. have only substance abuse issues.

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Qualitative Needs: Summary of Local Providers Interviews *Persons Exiting Corrections into Homelessness in WA County*

Current Trends

- WA County Jail releases many inmates to the County - most of whom originated from the area prior to their offense.
- Many homeless individuals exiting WA County Jail will go to Portland for shelter if they have no home to return to in the County.
- New trend – more older homeless men and women leaving corrections in the County.
- There is some specialized housing capacity in the County for the ex-offender population – primarily the WA County Restitution Center's Transitional Lodger Program.
- The Transitional Lodger Program is well linked to the local recovery community/ recovery settings.
- This population has benefited from significant recent increase in the number of Oxford Houses in the County.
- Castle House, a private rooming house which is religious based, has been a well utilized resource for the corrections population. It has some beds available for those who can not pay. It works well for those on Medicaid/ SSI.
- Ex-offenders applying to the WA County Section 8 program are often denied due to the program's policy of checking Criminal Offense Record Inquiries (CORIs).
- Some of those exiting corrections are housed by a private individual in the County who offers shared rentals to local ex-offenders.

Unmet Needs

- There is lack of links between the Transitional Lodger program and long term mainstream subsidized housing options in the County.
- There is particular need for housing and services for homeless ex-offenders with mental illness.
- There is a need for assistance to soon to be discharged incarcerated persons in obtaining SSI/SSDI/ Medicaid - which are needed to avoid homelessness upon release.
- There is a need for a residential setting for homeless ex-offenders who are not stable enough in recovery for Oxford House (i.e. need more harm reduction setting or more structured/ serviced setting)
- There is a need for more Shelter Plus Care Vouchers for seriously mentally ill persons particularly those who were recently incarcerated.
- There is a need for a woman-only version of the existing Safe Haven program for women who are disinclined to live in the coed setting due to past trauma and/or abuse.
- There is a need to better link Community Corrections to the mainstream affordable housing community.
- There is a need for more affordable housing that is willing to accept those with criminal records.
- There is a need for better advocacy and skilled case management to assist persons with criminal records in making successful appeals when they are turned down for mainstream subsidized housing.

The WA County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

Qualitative Needs Assessment: Summary of Local Providers Interviews *Homeless Families in WA County*

Current Trends

- There are steadily increasing numbers of families seeking shelter in the County.
- Homeless families are languishing on waiting list for shelter for months in the County.
- Existing shelters are overwhelmed by demand. There is a very recent spike in the number of families on the waiting list for shelter.
- Families make up the vast majority of homeless people seeking services in WA County.
- In recent months, more families are getting into financial trouble paying rent.
- In the past, homeless families benefited from the “renters’ market” conditions where management companies were flexible as to who they would rent to and what kinds of move-in specials they would offer.
- Recent change in rental market made flexible rent options less available.
- In general, the social services in the County seem to meet the needs of homeless families for mental health etc.
- The most common demographic group among local homeless families is generally single women heads of household.
- Farm working families are not seen frequently in shelter (living instead in trailers in woods etc.)
- Latino families are well represented in family shelters. It seems that most are documented.
- The recent trend is for more two parent families in shelter.
- The recent trend is for more working parents in shelter.
- The recent trend is for an increase in victims of domestic violence – particularly from rural areas – evident in shelters.
- There are some families moving to WA County from Multnomah County seeking a better quality of life. They come without awareness of the high cost of living in the WA County.
- Hillsboro is noted by some as having high incidence of homeless families.
- Many homeless families originate from the central areas of Beaverton, Hillsboro, and Tigerton where there are older apartment complexes.
- Homeless families also originate from low income pockets in outskirts of Cornelius and Forest Grove.

Unmet Needs

- There is a need for homelessness prevention targeted to families.
- There is a need for transportation – lack of it limits options to look outside the County for affordable housing options when none can be found locally.
- The biggest unmet need for homeless families is affordable housing.
- There is a need to move families out of shelter faster to better accommodate those waiting.
- Families/ heads-of-household need more than TANF to afford local rents. They can not exit homelessness without income.
- Heads of household who are disabled require better access to SSI/ SSDI.

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Qualitative Needs Assessment: Summary of Local Providers Interviews *Homeless Job Seekers in WA County*

Current Trends

- Many homeless singles in the County are, in fact, working – many at day labor through Labor Ready. However, they are not making a living wage.
- Many homeless singles also use “canning” as primary source of money.
- The recent trend is for more working parents in local shelters.
- Portland based Goodwill (serves disabled) and Habitation are the primary employment and training providers in the area that homeless people may be able to access.
- Some high tech companies left the area in recent years – leaving unemployment behind which was a catalyst to homelessness for some families.
- Most formerly homeless people in the County who were successful finding local jobs how work in the service economy (restaurants) or back office work (such as call centers).
- There seem to be recent gains in sensitivity to the pressures on low income people in the County – i.e. the community wants to help homeless people succeed.

Unmet Needs

- The County lacks a formal strategy or program to address the job training and placement needs of homeless people.
- Homeless heads of household need jobs that pay a living wage.
- Homeless singles need more than canning and day labor income if they are to stabilize their lives.
- Families/ heads-of-household need more than TANF to afford local rents. They can not exit homelessness without more substantial income.
- All disabled homeless people in the County need better access to SSI/ SSDI. Many are likely eligible but are not now receiving this entitlement income.
- The local TANF program needs to monitor how well formerly homeless families are retaining TANF to ensure that the recent reauthorization of this entitlement does not lead to sudden loss of this income – and vulnerability to homelessness.

The WA County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

Qualitative Needs Assessment: Summary of Local Providers Interviews *Latino Families in WA County*

Current Trends

- In general, the Latino population is growing in the County in keeping with its overall growth in ethnic diversity. Latinos, however, are increasing at a faster rate than other ethnic groups.
- The number of Latino families in poverty is increasing in the County.
- Ethnic minorities in WA County, including Latinos, have the lowest home ownership rates in the County.
- The number of Latino migrant laborers in the County is diminishing. There has been a significant drop since the 1990s.
- Local shelters find that Latino families are well represented in the mix of demographic groups asking for help.
- Typically, Latino homeless persons in the County are more “invisible” than their non-Latino counterparts – i.e. they typically do not present themselves for emergency assistance or shelter as readily.
- Latino homeless people in the County are more likely to rely on doubling or tripling up with friends and extended family in overcrowded and unstable living arrangements than seek shelter and emergency assistance.
- The number of homeless Latinos is likely to be undercounted due to their lower visibility.
- Latino families who lack housing may be more likely to choose uninhabitable living conditions such as a defunct trailer in the woods.
- Latino families who are undocumented face complex problems – they hide their crisis from public services out of fear that their status may be revealed if and when they seek help.
- Some homeless Latinos face language barriers to service and emergency help.
- Latino families with unstable housing arrangements in the County are often transient – moving back and forth between the migrant camps in the County and conventional housing where they are temporarily doubled up.
- Homeless Latino families in the County with adolescent children face multiple social challenges for their youth – high drop out rates, gang activity, and high rates of alcohol abuse.
- The Cultural Center in the County serving Latinos uses an “asset building” approach to meeting needs – i.e. emphasizing education, skill building, and tools for economic independence.

Unmet Needs

- Latino homeless families and singles lack the same housing, income, and support services as non-Latinos.
- Latinos homeless families and singles lack the ability to access local resources and services across the barriers of their invisibility, cultural divisions, and language differences.
- The homeless service continuum lacks any specific outreach targeted to the Latino community – particularly the “invisible” segment.